



Maryland General Assembly  
House Judiciary Committee  
February 20, 2024

Testimony of Meredith R. Weisel  
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ADL (the Anti-Defamation League) is pleased to submit this testimony in **support of HB1041, Criminal Law – Hate Crimes – Religion and Disability**, which would add the word “religion” to the existing Maryland hate crime statute, which currently only states “religious beliefs.”

**ADL (the Anti-Defamation League)**

Since 1913, the mission of ADL (the Anti-Defamation League) has been to “stop the defamation of the Jewish people and to secure justice and fair treatment to all.” For decades, one of the most important ways in which ADL has fought against bigotry and antisemitism has been by investigating extremist threats across the ideological spectrum and by working with law enforcement, educators, the tech industry, and elected leaders to promote best practices to effectively address and counter these threats. Further, ADL conducts an annual *Audit of Anti-Semitic Incidents*, which is widely used by law enforcement, elected officials, and the community at-large to not only understand how to respond to antisemitic incidents, but how to create change.

Related to this work, ADL has long been recognized as a leading resource on effective responses to violent bigotry, including hate crimes. In 1981, ADL crafted the first model hate crime law in the country, and today, 46 states, as well as the District of Columbia, have hate crime laws, many of which are based on or substantially similar to our model, which was unanimously upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court. We were also privileged to lead a broad coalition of civil rights, religious, educational, professional, law enforcement, and civic organizations for more than a decade in support of the 2009 Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act (HCPA).

Behind every hate crime statistic, there is a person, a family, a community – dealing with the unimaginable. Hate crimes cause a distinct type of harm that can have a lasting, immeasurable impact. This is because hate crimes target people due to their protected, immutable characteristics – race, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, sex, gender, gender identity, disability – things about a person that are central to identity and cannot be changed.

Clarifying that someone’s “religion” and not just their “religious beliefs” is a protected class in the hate crime law is a way to solidify that targeting someone based on their religion will be held accountable under the hate crime statute.

**We urge the Committee to release HB1041 with a favorable report.**